



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General,
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

**Briefing to the Security Council on the 17th report of the Secretary-General on
the threat posed by Da'esh**

25 August 2023

[As delivered]

Madam President,
Excellencies,

I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to present the seventeenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by Da'esh to international peace and security, and the United Nations efforts in support of Member States to counter the threat.

I would like to start by expressing my sincere condolences to the governments and people of all Member States who have suffered from terrorism.

Earlier this week, the Secretary-General helped mark the sixth International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism. The horrific impact of terrorism on the lives and livelihoods of so many people give impetus to our common efforts to counter and prevent it.

The victims and survivors of terrorism continue to serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of sustaining multilateral efforts against Da'esh and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

On 19 June, the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism together with the group of friends of victims of terrorism held a dedication ceremony to plant the Victims of Terrorism Solidarity Tree at the UN Headquarters. This tree will stand as a timeless and powerful symbol of the commitment of the United Nations and the international community to protect and promote the rights of victims of terrorism.

Madam President,
Excellencies,

I am pleased that Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, Ms. Nathalia Gherman, is joining me today, to present this report, which our offices prepared jointly with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, led by Mr. Justin Hustwitt.

As highlighted in this and previous reports, Da'esh and its affiliates continue to constitute a serious threat in conflict zones and neighbouring countries. However, the threat level remains low in non-conflict areas. This analytical distinction can obscure what is the complex, context-specific and dynamic nature of how these groups operate and evolve and their impact on international peace and security.

In parts of Africa, the continued expansion of Da'esh and affiliated groups, as well as the increasing level of violence and threat, remain deeply concerning.

The Da'esh affiliate in the Sahel is becoming increasingly autonomous and increasing attacks in Mali, as well as Burkina Faso and the Niger. The confrontations between this group and Al-Qaida affiliates in the region, coupled with the uncertain situation after the coup d'état in the Niger, present a complex and multi-faceted challenge.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, attacks by terrorist and other armed groups have also risen, with continued clashes between Government forces and terrorist groups. In the eastern region of the country, some 500 persons have perished due to terrorist violence.

Conflict and instability in Sudan have also renewed the attention on the presence and activity of Da'esh and other terrorist groups in that country.

Beyond Africa, the situation in Afghanistan is growing increasingly complex, with fears of weapons and ammunition falling in the hands of terrorists now materializing. The in-country operational capabilities of Da'esh's so-called Khorasan province, sanctioned as ISIL-K, has reportedly increased, with the group becoming more sophisticated in its attacks against the Taliban and international targets.

Moreover, the presence and activity of some 20 different terrorist groups in the country, combined with the repressive measures put in place by the Taliban de facto authorities, the absence of sustainable development and a dire humanitarian situation, pose significant challenges for the region and beyond.

This complex picture remains despite successful counter-terrorism initiatives by Member States. There has been progress in targeting Da'esh finances and leadership cadres, including the death

of Da'esh leader earlier this year, confirmed by Da'esh itself after the report's completion. These measures had a notable effect on the group's operations in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as elsewhere.

Counter-terrorism initiatives in Egypt, Mozambique and Yemen have also significantly limited the ability to conduct operations. Yet, the risk of resurgence remains.

As a result of counter-terrorism efforts, Da'esh has moved to adopt less hierarchical and more networked, decentralised structures, following Al-Qaida's footsteps, with increased operational autonomy by its affiliated groups. While there is little evidence that the core leadership is exercising command and control of regional affiliates - financial, propaganda and other connections remain.

Perhaps most notably, the typical surge in Da'esh violence during the month of Ramadan did not materialize in 2023.

The situation in camps and detention facilities in the northeast of the Syrian Arab Republic that hold individuals with alleged links to Da'esh and other terrorist groups has been dire for many years and is unlikely to improve soon. Although the increased pace of repatriations, mainly by Iraq, is welcome, tens of thousands of people, mostly women and children, are still stranded in camps and detention facilities., with unpredictable consequences for regional and international security.

Madam President,
Excellencies,

I offer four key observations for this Council's consideration.

First, compliance with international law, including international human rights law and humanitarian law, remains the essential bedrock for the success of counter-terrorism efforts. Actions that contravene these legal obligations only undermine global efforts against terrorism. Effective counter-terrorism requires inclusive approaches and gender-responsive measures.

Second, the persistent challenges posed by terrorism underline the need for counter-terrorism initiatives to be firmly grounded in political strategies for resolving the conflicts that fuel terrorism the most. Force alone cannot lead to changes in the conditions conducive to terrorism.

Indeed, the use of force, with no backing of clear strategy and not anchored on international law, can be counter-productive, fuelling more violence, aggravating grievances exploited by terrorists and creating conditions conducive to the proliferation of terrorist groups.

And in this regard, the Secretary-General in his policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace, has called for a new generation of counter-terrorism operations, led by African partners with a Security Council mandate under Chapters VII and VIII of the UN Charter, with guaranteed funding through assessed contributions. These operations should align with the full range of the United Nations tools and mechanisms for responding to crises.

Third, prevention. The nature of the threat posed by Da'esh underscores the need for more complementarity between security responses and preventive measures. Further efforts are required to prioritize and significantly increase investment in prevention efforts. The integrated and balanced implementation of the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy would help ensure this very point.

Finally, developments in some parts of Africa are deeply concerning and interconnected with existing conflicts and local grievances. The African Counter-Terrorism Summit being organized by the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism and the Government of Nigeria to be held in Abuja next year, will offer an opportunity to redouble international support and explore transcontinental approaches to address this situation.

Madam President,
Excellencies,

The General Assembly's adoption of resolution 77/298 on its eighth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy sustained the long-standing multilateral consensus on counter-terrorism.

The adoption of this resolution should serve as a reminder that consensus does not come easy. However, once achieved, it reaffirms the unity of Member States against terrorism.

Countering and preventing terrorism require long-term commitment as well as continued and coordinated efforts. I welcome the support expressed by all stakeholders at the 2023 United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week in New York to multilateral efforts to counter terrorism and look forward to the close collaboration with partners on key priorities identified during the High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States.

The United Nations, including the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, will continue to support Member States in their endeavour to address the scourge of terrorism.

I thank you for your attention.